





## The Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang (Part 4)

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Kusanagi Godou and the Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang, began their battle in front of a riverside hut.

This was a confrontation between the god-slaying sword wielded by the war god Verethragna against the transformation arts employed by the noble, evil-slaying god of China.

"Manifest justice in this world through these spell words of mine!"

Chanting the sacred warlord's incantation, Godou accelerated a portion of the [Sword].

Over a thousand spheres of light, shining brightly like stars in the night sky, surrounded Godou all around and overhead.

From among them, ten-odd spheres of light flew towards True Lord Erlang.

The three-eyed, handsome young man was supposed to be attacked by these spheres of light, but his current appearance was that of a muscular old man.

The enemy had taken the form of the hermit [Heretic God], Susanoo, with whom Godou was acquainted.

(Fufu. This skill is employed for the sake of countering your spell words of the sword. Savor it well.)

The flying [Swords] struck Susanoo/True Lord Erlang's body.

But Godou frowned. They simply struck without causing any damage.

The [Sword] turned out to be completely useless!

(These spell words are the blades for slicing True Lord Erlang the Illustrious Sage... In that case, were I to transform into another god, I should be able to withstand them more or less. It looks like my idea is correct.)

"Looks like it, but then again, there should be limits to transformations, right?"

He had transformed into completely unrelated divinities.

No matter how skilled in the spell of transformation, he could not possibly keep this up indefinitely. Godou began to focus his gaze and stared at the being who looked just like the old god Susanoo.

The [Warrior] incarnation, which controlled the sword of spell words, possessed the power to see through an enemy's true nature.

Currently, True Lord Erlang could be described as weaving Susanoo's divinity using the spell of transformation to cover himself like a layer of clothing.

In this manner, Verethragna's [Sword] could apparently be deceived for now—

Godou then discovered something. He could see a tiny crack in this layer of clothing where True Lord Erlang's original divinity was leaking out.

So long as it could be seen like this—the enemy can be vanquished!

"I am the strongest, holding all victory in my hands! All evil-doers, tremble before my strength."

Chanting spell words with certainty, Godou caused roughly ten spheres of light to accelerate. Then the spheres flew before Susanoo/True Lord Erlang one after another, and just before they penetrated that muscular body—

(Make haste! To manifest endless divine powers, a miracle shall appear!)

Susanoo's lips moved to release True Lord Erlang's whispers. The enemy was chanting spell words as well.

The storm god's appearance changed at this time, taking on a new form in seconds.

"Another guy I know!"

Godou yelled.

This time, True Lord Erlang had become a glaring old man dressed in a black coat.

An air of intellect combined with a pair of emerald-green eyes like a tiger's—the enemy from the past, Dejanstahl Voban.

Furthermore, the instant True Lord Erlang took on the guise of Devil King "Voban"—

Godou could no longer see the crack. After True Lord Erlang's original divinity was concealed beneath the newly transformed appearance, the crack was no longer visible.

As Godou watched in great surprise, the [Swords] struck Voban's body.



Once again, they struck their target without any effect. Apparently because Godou could no longer see the crack, the [Sword] was unable to slice True Lord Erlang's divinity inside.

This countermeasure stonewalled the [Sword]'s spell words...!

Godou glared sharply in defiance to the enemy's little trick. In response, a refreshing smile appeared on Voban's face. A rather dissonant sight. Indeed, the elderly man could not possibly smile so cheerfully.

This stood as evidence that True Lord Erlang was actually inside.

Since that was the case, Godou focused his eyes and stared again, in order to find a similar imperfection in the transformation spell.

However, before he could succeed, True Lord Erlang took action.

(Make haste!)

Accompanied by brief spell words, he transformed again.

This time, he did not take on the appearance of a Campione but a deity instead.

Godou jumped in surprise. It was a nostalgic silver-haired pubescent girl. Although she was wearing modern clothing, she gave off a conqueror's aura like a queen. This was the serpent goddess of darkness whom Godou had fought in the past.

True Lord Erlang transformed into Heretic Athena, and at the same time—

(Light that reveals evil, manifest thus. Enact miracles to vanquish evil and uphold justice, burn the heretics and weaken all evil!)

A vertical opening appeared on young Athena's forehead to reveal a third eye. This eye suddenly shone brightly.

Instantly, Godou felt magical power flowing out of his body.

"Guh—!"

The third eye seemed to manifest the miracle of stealing a Campione's power.

Godou recalled what happened during dusk.

When facing off against True Lord Erlang for the first time, he was also drained of magical power in the same way.

Seeing as that was the case, Godou instantly raised the magical power in his body in order to resist the miracle enacted by the [Eye]. A Campione's body already possessed extremely potent resistance against magic and authorities. So long as Godou was not caught off guard, he could prevent his magical power from being completely drained. Nevertheless, he still clicked his tongue.

Godou could still feel the magical power in his body siphoned off slowly.

As expected of his "nemesis." Godou could not defend completely. Accompanying the loss of magical power, the [Sword]'s shining spheres of light disappeared one by one from Godou's surroundings.

Then the enemy's counterattack came.

(Fufufu, now is about time for me to begin taking the offensive.)

Three-eyed Athena murmured as she approached.

With lightning speed, Athena/True Lord Erlang jumped in front of Godou. A three-pronged bladed polearm manifested in the goddess' right hand.

This was True Lord Erlang's double-edged trident—using this weapon, the enemy made a thrust towards Godou's heart!

A sure-kill thrust was arriving with frightening speed.

Just in the nick of time, Godou jumped left and managed to evade the attack.

Campiones were blessed with exceptional concentration during combat. Thanks to that, Godou was able to scurry around with beast-like reflexes.

"It feels like this guy should be able to fight equally with that idiot Doni..."

Faced with his opponent's overwhelming offensive, Godou groaned.

Salvatore Doni was a genius swordsman for whom titles such as Sword Demon or Sword God would not be excessive. At the same time, he was also a Campione. Godou recognized that True Lord Erlang's martial prowess were on the same level as that man.

Attempting to use the [Raptor] incarnation's divine speed to fight—would be a poor decision indeed.

Masters on this level should be able to see through divine speed, rendering it meaningless.

(Since I have grown accustomed to this body, my movements will not be as clumsy as earlier. Come, fight me fair and square!)

"If you want to fight fair and square, then I hope you'd stop using those absurd transformations!"

True Lord Erlang smiled and ignored Godou's retort, transforming once again.

This time he turned into Athena's adolescent form, instantly growing taller and lengthening the arms and legs. The clothes also changed into modest, ancient attire—the original appearance Athena had recovered.

Seeing this, Godou attempted to search for a flaw in the transformation again.

But just as he was about to do that, True Lord Erlang suddenly threw away the double-edged trident in his hand. At the same time, the ambush took place.

Ena slashed towards True Lord Erlang who was in Athena's form.

In order to avoid getting in the way of Godou's manipulation of the [Sword], the Hime-Miko of the Sword had kept her distance from the battlefield, lying in wait for a chance to make a surprise attack with the jet-black divine blade, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

"Yaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Ena swung the divine sword overhead using the hassou-no-kamae stance.<sup>[1]</sup> This was a strike using the body's full power.

Most likely eschewing all defense, this was a deadly blow focused entirely on taking out the enemy. Furthermore, Ena was already in the state of divine possession, having summoned Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's divine aura into her body.

Nevertheless, Athena/True Lord Erlang calmly evaded the slash with a light twist of the body.

Not only that, he even swung his right hand like a whip in a flash during the instant Ena moved past him. Effortlessly, he pushed the Hime-Miko away with the back of his hand.

(O maiden, such ferocious vigor you have!)

"Guh—!"

"Are you okay, Seishuuin!?"

Seeing his companion sent flying by the god's blow and fallen on the ground, Godou called out.

Ena swiftly got up before she answered and prepared the divine sword in a stance once more. Her quick movements and imposing demeanor indicated that she was not injured.

"No harm done at all, Your Majesty. Completely okay."

Ena reported her safety completely nonchalantly.

"Didn't the god, True Lord Erlang, mention just now? He will obtain victory without harming Ena whatsoever. So there shouldn't be any danger."

"We can't possibly believe that guy completely. He could easily go back on a verbal agreement."

"True. But then again, Ena feels like this god won't go back on his word. How should one put it? Basically he absolutely won't do anything immoral like that..."

Ena disagreed with Godou's warning.

Godou was mildly surprised, although he did secretly harbor the same impression Ena got from the god.

Even if the fundamental nature of the divinity was benevolent, wandering on earth as a heretic caused distortions at the same time, finally resulting in a god of misfortune bringing calamity and disaster. This was what [Heretic Gods] were supposed to be.

(Ho. There is no need to be concerned with trivial details of that sort.)

Keeping the third eye open, Athena/True Lord Erlang smiled.



(Your considerations are correct. I, Erlang, am not one of those who shamelessly renege on their own promises. How about I swear an oath not to harm you the slightest?)

Immediately after declaring thus, True Lord Erlang manifested a new weapon in his hand.

First there was the bow in his left hand. Then there was the fist-sized ball of iron in his right. The evil-slaying and righteous warrior god placed the iron ball onto the bowstring and drew the bow to its limit.

The iron ball was shot like an arrow—This was the ancient Chinese long range weapon known as the peddle bow.

Twang! As the bowstring sounded, the iron ball flew out. The target was Kusanagi Godou, naturally. Furthermore, the iron ball released crackling blue-white lightning as it flew!

Just as Godou and Ena readied their stances to receive the incoming attack—

"Eli Eli lama sabachthani? Oh Lord, why hast thou forsaken me!?"

Godou and Ena both heard familiar spell words.

"O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent—" <sup>[2]</sup>

These were the Golgotha spell words, the trump card of the girl known as the [Diavolo Rosso].

Just as expected, Erica leaped from the shadows amidst the trees, wrapped in her usual red and black cape, carrying the lion's magic sword, Cuore di Leone.

"But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel!" <sup>[3]</sup>

The magic sword was currently infused with the spell words of resentment and despair.

An ordinary human would probably die instantly upon close contact with the sword. Using Cuore di Leone which had been imbued with this power, Erica struck down the electrified iron ball head on.

Lightning scattered noisily as the two halves of the iron ball rolled about on the ground.

The latecomer turned her head back to reveal a cheerful smile, her face as glamorous as always.

"I seem to have kept you two waiting, Godou and Ena-san."

"You don't seem very flustered, on the other hand."

Godou calmly replied to the "partner" who had finally arrived.

Although this battle was playing out completely differently from past conflicts, Godou found himself surprisingly calm and composed—

Simply the fact of Erica's arrival gave him such a feeling.

"Because I have appointments with other people sometimes. It's hard to be in both places at once. But no matter, it's not like one could bring a million reinforcements."

Erica asserted fearlessly, reminiscent of a lioness.

"Just as you already know, I, Erica Blandelli alone, am more valuable than a million reinforcements. Godou, I shall prove my worth and compensate my tardy arrival at the same time!"

Even though she was already late, Erica easily took the spotlight as the protagonist in the scene.

This manner of entering the stage made full use of Erica's natural talents.

In response to Erica's appearance, the warrior god transformed from Athena back to his original form.

This was True Lord Erlang the Illustrious Sage's reappearance as the tall and handsome young man as well as the three-eyed warrior.

(Kusanagi Godou's direct vassals have gathered. In that case, I have no choice but to show my true appearance once more.)

"Gathered?"

"Yes. I cannot possibly let Erica steal ahead and take all the credit!"

Answering in a stern tone, this was Liliana's voice which Godou had not heard for the last few hours.

Wielding the bow of Jonathan in her hand, she walked to Godou's side.

Godou went "I see" and nodded. The girls must have rushed over from Tokyo to Chichibu after receiving the letter Godou and Ena had sent several hours earlier.

After arriving near this mountain, they used magic to search for Godou's location, then flew here using Liliana's flight magic—

If that was how things transpired, it would only be natural for another girl to be present. Just as expected, Yuri also came running, dressed in her miko outfit.

"Godou-san, I have important news regarding True Lord Erlang..."

Yuri reported as soon as she arrived by Godou's side.

"About the noble one... The real identity of the True Lord!"

Godou was shocked by her words. He immediately swept his gaze towards the rest of his companions. Erica, Liliana and Ena all nodded in response, implying they will hold the god off for a while.

"Yaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Ena rushed headlong with Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, charging at True Lord Erlang. She unleashed a blazing slash.

The True Lord swiftly evaded the attack. Aiming at this opportunity, Erica used Cuore di Leone to make a thrusting attack. Thrice in a row.

Although True Lord Erlang evaded the three thrusts successively, he was thrown off balance slightly.

Erica instantly leaped to the right, creating an opening for Liliana to fire her arrows.

The arrows of blue-white light shot by the bow of Jonathan were also infused with the spell words of David!

(Fufufufu. These maidens are quite a handful to handle!)

With extreme alacrity, True Lord Erlang swung his right hand, striking down the arrow of light with a karate chop.

Indeed, these were literally divine skills that only a warrior god could possess.

Next, Ena used Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi again to perform an overhead cut. It was a jumping slash that used the entire body's strength.

True Lord Erlang caught the divine sword with both hands in a display of the secret arts of unarmed counters against bladed weaponry.

Ena, Erica and Liliana carried out their own attacks in continuous succession.

Meanwhile, True Lord Erlang exhibited all sorts of divine skills, evading, deflecting and blocking the trio's attacks completely.

However, Erica and the girls were not so pressed as to be driven back, due to the fact that the True Lord only engaged in defense. Thus, the girls succeeded in buying time for Godou.

During this time, Godou listened to what Yuri had to say.

"You saw what kind of god he is?"

"Yes. The True Lord Erlang manifesting here is not a [Heretic God]. Instead, he could be said to be... A [True God]."

Hearing Yuri's oracle, Godou was rendered dumbfounded. A true god? Did that refer to a particular god?

"Godou-san, you already know that the Netherworld is the place known as the Boundary of Life and Immortality. The Domain of Life refers to the mortal world here. The Domain of Immortality is the world where gods originally reside."

Yuri explained the structure of the world in quick tone of voice.

"[Heretic Gods] do not exist in the Domain of Immortality. When gods arrive in the mortal world by some chance occurrence, they are twisted and become [Heretic Gods] who deviate from their original existence. The god manifesting here is the True Lord Erlang who only exists in the Domain of Immortality... So this should be an clone."

"You said clone? A clone of the actual Erlang?"

"Yes. It feels like the True Lord is transmitting his divine power from the Domain of Immortality, thereby taking action with this clone. That is the feeling I am getting."

"Come to think of it, that guy did mention something about a 'crude body.'"

Godou did not think Yuri's speculation was off. He nodded.

I see. So that was why he made a perfect display of how a evil-slaying warrior god of benevolence should act.

"In that case, then the [White Stallion] definitely could not target him."

The unfortunate gut feeling he was having was now confirmed. Godou sighed. To be honest, he was banking his hope on the [White Stallion] a little.

Godou had wondered if the handsome god would expose his nature as a [Heretic God] sooner or later.

In that case, the battle against him became even simpler.

"So Godou-san's 'nemesis' that I sensed last time, really turns out to be..."

"Looks like it's this guy. And indeed he's tough to handle, most truly."

"Umm, Godou-san? Despite saying that, your face looks rather calm."

"Hmm, yeah. It's basically thanks to you, Mariya, I am now able to steel my resolve."

Godou smiled wryly in response to the incredulous Hime-Miko's query.

"Or rather, you've helped my muster my determination to test out a drastic measure I wanted to avoid as much as possible. Otherwise, I really wouldn't have wanted to do this."

"But even if I tried, I cannot stop you, right?"

This time it was Yuri's turn to sigh while Godou scratched his head.

"Since it has come to this, I can only say this to you: Please take care...!"

"Yeah. I will try my best to return alive. So that's that!"

Yuri's words were analogous to a virtuous wife bidding farewell to a terrible husband who was setting off for a reckless duel.

Feeling gratitude for the gentleness in Yuri's gaze, Godou rushed towards the god and the rest of his companions.

This was in front of the hut where he and Ena had stayed, the riverside where he had passed by when hiking earlier in the night.

The trio of Erica, Ena and Liliana currently had True Lord Erlang surrounded.

Ultimately, they were able to persevere till now only because the enemy did nothing but defend.

While evading the girls' magic sword, divine sword and arrows of light, the True Lord finally attacked.

First he shouted "Hah!" to immobilize Liliana. Then he poked Ena in the back with his middle finger, sending the Hime-Miko of the Sword collapsing on her knees.

Finally, he swung his arm like a whip and struck Erica with the back of his hand.

Although the blonde beauty already used Cuore di Leone to block, she still could not withstand the impact and was sent flying faraway.

Godou's arrival coincided with where she was flying, so he immediately caught her.

"Are you okay, Erica?"

"Yes, I guess. What about you, are you ready?"

Held in his arms, Erica did not have any injuries. Indeed, the enemy was truly a warrior god of benevolence. True Lord Erlang's earlier oath applied to people apart from Ena and he intended to adhere to it to the very end.

"Yes. I will decide the match next so there's something I need your help for."

True Lord Erlang displayed a light smile as he stared straight at Godou.

His companions could no longer pin him down so Godou explained concisely.

"What I'm about to do will be quite risky so I'm relying on you. If it succeeds, my life will be saved, so do your best."

"What completely vague orders. But you can thank me, Erica Blandelli, right now."

The smile surfacing on Erica's face displayed a lioness' ferocity and a queen's glory.



"I will show you that I am the woman who will surely meet your expectations!"

"Yeah, I'm relying on you."

Ending the brief planning session, Godou sprinted towards True Lord Erlang.

Now it was time to decide the match one on one. True Lord Erlang smiled at the arrival of the final phase.

(Fufu. You have already discovered my true nature.)

"This is only your clone. Your real self must be hidden somewhere, right?"

(Hiding myself is truly regrettable. A true god has no way of traveling to the mortal world. Or rather, the instant one leaves, one becomes heretical...)

True Lord Erlang's clone murmured in the same sort of incredible whispers he used previously.

This voice was likely transmitted all the way from the Domain of Immortality.

(Having taken an interest in you who has involved yourself with an old acquaintance of mine, I was thinking of testing you a little. Coincidentally, those miko happened to be randomly messing with my talisman.)

"Give me a break. If that's the case, could you not involve anyone apart from me!?"

Saying that, Godou turned his attention to the sky.

There were still a few dozen [Swords] hovering high above.

"Go!"

A brief spell word caused all the [Swords] to begin moving all at once.

They were aimed at True Lord Erlang, naturally. One after another, the spheres of light struck their target. However, it was still ineffective because the True Lord had taken on Athena's appearance again.

While withstanding the attacks of the [Sword]'s spell words, True Lord Erlang smiled using Athena's face.

(Kusanagi Godou. You cannot defeat me in this manner...)

"Of course I know that. So... please, Seishuun!"

Godou made his request to the kneeling Hime-Miko. Ena instantly understood his intentions.

"Yes. Ama no Murakumo, return to His Majesty!"

The jet-black divine sword disappeared from Ena and manifested in Godou's hand instead.

The self-styled "partner" of the god-slayer, the god in the form of a sword. Godou gripped the Japanese sword's hilt tightly as he glared at Athena/True Lord Erlang.

Finally free of the [Sword]'s wave of attacks, the benevolent warrior god drew his peddle bow and fired!

The iron ball was shot. Judging from its trajectory, it was aimed at Kusanagi Godou's forehead. The iron ball sliced through wind as it traveled but Godou evaded calmly.

Just as the iron ball was about to strike Godou on the forehead, he used the [Raptor] incarnation.

This was the incarnation that could only be used in response to a high speed attack. While using this incarnation of divine speed, Godou obtained a light and agile body as well as overwhelming acceleration while everything else slowed down—

The iron ball slicing through the wind slowed down all at once, allowing Godou to dodge with ease.

However, the use of this incarnation caused severe heart pain to Godou afterwards and also immobilized his body not long after that.

(Fufu. Do you really believe you can defeat me in the limited time you have remaining?)

Seeing a time limit in Godou's course of action, True Lord Erlang smiled.

At the same time, he transformed from Athena back to the original handsome young man. He must have concluded that there was no need to transform once Godou no longer had the [Sword].

Just as he pointed out, there was little time remaining.

Hence, Godou had to decide the match in one fell swoop.

Wielding Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi arbitrarily, Godou pointed the blade at True Lord Erlang and made a straight thrust. Using the [Raptor]'s divine speed, he attacked in a straight line!

(Hmph, no matter what kind of divine speed, fast as lightning, I can still see through it!)

Boldly asserting, True Lord Erlang swung his right fist in response.

A martial arts move capable of countering divine speed. This was a secret art that both Salvatore Doni and Her Eminence Luo Hao had exhibited in the past. Nevertheless, because of Erlang's "crude body" as Godou expected—

True Lord Erlang's fist failed to strike down Godou. Instead, it resulted in mutual injuries.

Godou pierced the flank of True Lord Erlang's abdomen using Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

True Lord Erlang's hook punch landed on Godou's left ribs.

"Guha!"

Suffering the horrifying attack, Godou felt intense pain.

It felt like being struck by lightning. Although the punch landed in the region of his ribs, the terrifying impact coursed through his entire body. But at least he survived.

On the other hand, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was embedded deeply in True Lord Erlang's flank. Although the divine sword was buried to the hilt, there was not a single drop of bleeding.

(Hmm... This is getting challenging.)

True Lord Erlang's calm and composed whispers could be heard. As expected, this was not his true body.

Godou grinned savagely in response. Now he could put "that plan" into action...

Forcing his aching body to move, Godou kicked the ground and jumped.

(Hmm—!?)

Taking the skewered True Lord Erlang along with him, Godou took a leap.

The [Raptor] incarnation granted more than simply mobility of divine speed. Jumping ability and lightness of the body were also greatly augmented. Owing to this ability, Godou jumped into the river with divine speed.

The surface water current was quite rapid, with uneven rocks protruding. Since this was quite far up the mountain near the river's source, the water was not very deep, only reaching up to roughly knee or waist level at most.

Landing on a rock in the middle of the river, Godou jumped again.

Following the river, Godou aimed for some place higher, farther away.

(What are you planning, Kusanagi Godou!?)

Thanks to the giant leaps granted by the [Raptor], Godou obtained an overhead view of the headwater's flow. About thirty meters away from the hut where Godou and Ena had rested, there was a fast flowing waterfall.

Although the river was quite narrow at that point and lacked the magnificence of a great waterfall, the height of the fall was quite substantial. Probably a fall of forty or fifty meters roughly.

This was the type of waterfall that fishes could hardly swim through. Godou nodded for it was exactly as Ena described.

'There is a rapid current slightly downstream from here leading to a waterfall. The current is so fast that even fish find it difficult to swim in, which is why fish are rare in this area.'

Making his jumps as high and far as he could, Godou finally reached the air above the waterfall—

At last, Godou used his trump card, the one he really wanted to avoid using.

"For victory, hasten forth before me..."

As the leap reached its peak, Godou chanted spell words as freefall began.

From the air, Godou could hear the rumbling of the waterfall beneath.

"O immortal sun, I beseech thee to grant radiance to the stallion. O stallion that moveth godlike with wondrous grace, bringest forth the halo of thy master—!"

Only targeting great sinners who had brought suffering to the people, this was the [White Stallion] incarnation.

And this time, the target was—Kusanagi Godou himself.

(Fuhahahaha! You wish to defeat me even at the cost of sacrificing yourself?)

Despite the time being night, the rays of dawn appeared in the eastern sky.

Bathed in the rosy glow together with Godou, True Lord Erlang, currently skewered by Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, was unbelievably laughing with delight.

(T-To think you had the self-awareness of the great sinner you are!)

"S-Screw that! That's why I didn't want to use this method!"

(But then again, this means mutually assured destruction together with me?)

True Lord Erlang spoke as he motioned towards the faraway bottom of the waterfall they were freefalling towards.

He's not planning to resist? That's quite honest of him. In this very instant, a chain carrying an anchor came flying from the ground and wrapped itself multiple times around Godou's right foot.

True Lord Erlang whispered (Hmm!?) and stared dumbfounded. Godou breathed a sigh of relief.

"That girl Erica managed it after all..."

The instant he murmured, the chain clattered as it began to tug Godou's body.

This chain was created from Erica's iron alchemy. Launched into the air from the ground, it began to drag Godou.

Then the sun's shining light came flying from the eastern sky. Godou began to meditate silently: Reduce the scale of destruction as much as possible. Reduce, reduce... He kept reciting in his mind.

If the [White Stallion] was used without restraint, the tragic incineration of Palermo's harbor would be repeated.

By if he reduced the power as much as possible, he could limit destruction to roughly the size of two or three yachts. As for the greatest scale of destruction, Godou had no idea but the thought of testing it out never occurred to him...

Due to reducing the power halfway, the size of the shining beam of light shrunk all at once.

One resulting advantage was that the flames rushing through the sky missed the original target whose position had deviated—Kusanagi Godou who was being dragged by the chain.

In this manner, only True Lord Erlang was engulfed by the light and heat.

(Fufufu. What a fulfilling night, Kusanagi Godou. Should ill fate bring our paths to cross again, a rematch with no holds barred would be nice. Let us meet again!)

Godou barely managed to hear the handsome warrior god's parting words.

Perhaps he exhausted his good fortune in the scene just now. After saving Godou from his crisis, the chain loosened and lost grip of him. Godou fell straight down towards the waterfall beneath. Or rather than fall, he was crashing down.

The only saving grace was that the waterfall directly beneath would break his fall. Several seconds later, Godou crashed and sank into the water while experiencing a terrifying impact.

Furthermore, his heart was suffering maximum pain and his body was getting stiff with paralysis. These were all side effects after using the [Raptor].

Am I going to die this time? Godou was struck with the fear of death. Oh well, ever since becoming a Campione, he had already endured such terrifying experiences repeatedly, numbering in the teens.

One could say that terrifying experiences were customary now.

Even so—Godou began to ponder with deep feeling. He really wished for occasional opponents he could defeat easily with the [Ten Incarnations].



Facing opponents of that sort, he would not need to bear so much hardship every single time...

As he prayed for this wish from the bottom of his heart, Godou faced death once again.

"Are you okay, Kusanagi Godou!?"

Then someone extended a helping hand.

The god-slayer was saved by the selfless efforts of a friend, naturally, rather than a goddess of salvation.

Jumping swiftly into the waterfall, Liliana pulled Godou out from the water. Naturally, the silver-haired knight with flight capability would act the fastest in situations like this one.

Supported by Liliana on the bank at the bottom of the waterfall, Godou managed to sit up.

Very soon, he would enter the state of complete immobilization which would definitely result in drowning. Despite his embarrassing state, Godou desperately tried to speak.

"A-At least I survived... Thank you for saving me. But..."

Due to swallowing many mouthfuls of river water as well as the usual paralysis, Godou could not speak very well.

Nevertheless, he still forced himself to express gratitude to Liliana. He added:

"I-It's common for people trying to save the drowning to get into accidents themselves... Be more careful..."

"No need to worry. Do remember that I am a witch, so I more or less know several spells for preventing drowning. Witches are not only able to fly in the sky but also skilled in swimming in the water."

Influenced by Liliana's giggling smile, Godou smiled in return. Come to think of it, a mermaid swimming freely in the water would be quite an elegant sight.

Realizing he was saved as a result of this, Godou nodded gratefully to Liliana—Then he noticed something at this moment and frantically turned his gaze away.

To his great surprise, Liliana was dressed only in underwear. Her slender figure was clad only in a two-piece set of violet lingerie.

"M-My apologies. I was thinking it would be easier to save you in this manner, so I swiftly undressed before entering the water..."

"I-Idiot... I should be the one saying sorry about this. You shouldn't need to apologize."

Liliana used her arms to cover up her chest in embarrassment.

On the other hand, Godou's body had started to become rigid, preventing him from shifting his line of sight.

Consequently, the silver-haired knight desperately shrank into a ball, trying to avert his gaze.

But then she suddenly jumped in surprise and leaned close to Godou's face instead.

"U-Umm. I have a suggestion..."

Clearly it was just a simple question, but her voice sounded inexplicably seductive.

Her usual, stern demeanor was gone as if it never existed. Godou gulped in response.

"Kusanagi Godou. Your body seems to be in poor condition. I believe that healing magic needs to be administered."

"Eh...!?"

"Th-This is simply an act of healing. So you must accept it no matter what!"

"B-But even if you say that so suddenly..."

As much as Godou wanted to stop her, Liliana slowly pressed her lips close.

She intended to apply magic through mouth to mouth. As much as Godou wished to evade, his body could not move. Furthermore, he found himself attracted to Liliana's beautiful face and the moist-looking eyes gazing at him—



Just as he was about to accept the silver-haired knight's request—

"Wait a minute, Lily. Since everyone is here, you can't be stealing credit for yourself, right?"

"S-Stealing credit is something that never crossed my mind. I am simply worried about the state of my lord's health."

Erica expressed her objections with ladylike elegance. Although slightly panicking, Liliana still retorted in a stern and knightly tone of voice. At some point in time, everyone had arrived to this downstream location.

Erica, Ena had arrived. Even Yuri, who had contributed greatly, was approaching as she panted heavily.

"Besides, I believe that Seishuui Ena is the first person to steal a march."

Glancing at Ena's carefree face, Liliana stated.

"Kusanagi Godou must have obtained knowledge about True Lord Erlang at some point in time. The one who took on the role of instruction could be no one else but you."

"Yes. So that doesn't count as stealing a march."

Ena happily ignored the female knight's accusations.

"If someone else apart from Ena were present, then Ena wouldn't need to do it."

"However..."

"E-Excuse me, everyone. Let us first put this matter aside for now. Do remember that Godou-san fell from such a great height and was even drowning, okay!?"

Yuri interjected with a slightly angry tone of voice.

"Our first priority is to take care of Godou-san before—"

"You have a point, but there's really no need to be too concerned with priority at times like these, right?"

Erica smiled calmly in response.

"This person—Kusanagi Godou—is quite absurd in all sorts of ways, but above all is his ridiculous aspect of being 'unkillable.' "

"That does sound about right, but Erica-san!"

Godou was greatly pleased by Yuri's care towards him in furiously trying to convince the rest of the girls.

Oh well, as part of the common sense faction, Yuri would only accidentally say something like 'that does sound about right' because she was caught up in the mood of the situation.

In any case, Godou felt extremely cold in his completely drenched state, unable to move his arms at all.

Whether the dispute between the four girls, fights against strange gods, or even near death experiences like this, all of it could be considered a frequent occurrence in his life. Nothing particularly shocking.

Godou took a deep breath, feeling inexplicably happy about the girls' argument.

Meanwhile, in a corner of the Netherworld—

Two noble ones were standing face to face in a deep mountain hut while a storm raged outside. One was the elderly god known as Susanoo, the former [Heretic God] Haya Susanoo no Mikoto.

He was the storm god with intimate ties to Japanese imperial authority as well as the proper owner of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

"So, True Lord, what's your take on the brat?"

"A reckless and immature fellow. However, combined with the unruly willpower he displayed in the end, it is certainly fitting for a god-slayer. Speaking of which—"

The one answering Susanoo's question was the handsome warrior god, the Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang.

"The heavenly child who slumbers... To me it is difficult to determine if he is truly capable of defeating the god-slaying Devil Kings."

True Lord Erlang possessed the countenance of the [Noble Wandering Hero]. This was also an aspect belonging to the heroic god nicknamed the "King of the End."

"Are you filled with anticipation for something you sensed?"

"Hahaha. I believe that unruly fellow's exploits should not stop with battling the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Should an opportunity arise in the future, I will exterminate him for good."

True Lord Erlang laughed lightly and told Susanoo:

"In that case, I cannot idle here any longer."

"Hoho. My apologies for troubling you in various ways."

Almost simultaneously, True Lord Erlang disappeared from the thatched hut.

The real True Lord Erlang could only exist in the [Domain of Immortality].

This time, only a small portion of his divine spirit had descended upon the earth due to being summoned by the talisman of the Illustrious Sage.

Furthermore, this Netherworld was the homeward path leading to the Domain of Immortality.

Along the way back, True Lord Erlang had a chat with Susanoo at the latter's invitation.

Watching the True Lord vanish, Susanoo smiled with joy and refilled his wine cup.

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## References

1.   ↑   Hassou-no-kamae(八双の構え): one of the five stances of kendo, an offensive posture with the sword pointing upright and the blade sloping slightly to the rear.
2.   ↑   Psalm 22:2
3.   ↑   Psalm 22:2

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Generated on Tue Jun 11 14:34:18 2013